

WAR SPEECHES AND NATIONALIST DISCOURSE IN THE MALVINAS/FALKLAND WARS

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The Malvinas/Falklands War (2 April-14 June, 1982) was, to a certain extent, welcomed by the leaders of Argentina and Britain (Leopoldo Galtieri and Margaret Thatcher) because it united people by offering them a common outside enemy. The war became not only a battle between two armies which struggled for power over the small islands in the South Atlantic, but also a *war of words*. Newspapers, radio, and television combined forces to promote nationalist feelings or –whenever possible– challenge the war. This paper will compare the presidential speeches from both sides of the Atlantic and will show how Thatcher and Galtieri used similar mechanisms to trigger patriotism and gain public support.

Keywords: Malvinas/Falklands war, presidential speeches, nationalism, war discourse

1. Introduction: A Just War

*Jus ad bellum*¹ is Latin for “law to war”. It is an old concept with a set of principles that define a fair war and try to validate in which cases wars should be fought. Some of these principles are: having a just cause, being a last resort, being declared by a proper authority, and possessing the right intention, among many others (Moseley 2009). Some of these principles are controversial and may lead to different interpretations, especially the ones concerning a just cause or possessing the right intention: most nations or authorities that go to war claim to possess the truth. Both Thatcher and Galtieri believed that the Malvinas/Falklands War was *just* and acknowledged so in their speeches. Moreover, they both talked about peace, when in fact they were declaring war.²

On 3 July 1982, in the aftermath of the Falklands battle, Margaret Thatcher gave a major speech to the Conservative Rally at Cheltenham. This speech is considered to be “one of the most remarkable speeches in recent British politics, in which Thatcher gives her interpretation of the True Meaning of the war” (Barnett 1982: 63). She is convinced that the war fought in the South Atlantic is fair. She declares: “... we fought to show that aggression does not pay and that the robber cannot be allowed to get away with his swag ... we fought for our own people and for our own sovereign territory” (Thatcher: 3 July 1982). She daringly defines the Argentine as robbers and assures that the Falklands are British domain. According to the just war theory, initiating acts of aggression is unjust and gives the attacked group a rightful cause to defend itself. Thatcher believed that British territory was being invaded and that the British counterattack was a legitimate one.

Similarly, General Galtieri had no doubts about the sovereignty of the islands. On 2 April 1982, the day the islands were invaded by the Argentine troops, he delivered a speech from the balcony of the presidential house, the Casa Rosada, to the euphoric crowds that gathered in the Plaza de Mayo to celebrate the recovery of the islands and to express full support to the government and the cause. He announced: "Hemos recuperado ... las Islas Australes que integran por legítimo derecho el Patrimonio Nacional ... este Pueblo [está] dispuesto a escarmentar a quien se atreva a tocar un metro cuadrado de territorio argentino" (Galtieri: 2 April 1982). Moreover, Galtieri claimed to have respected another principle of just war, that of war being a last resort: "el Pueblo Argentino ... no admite discusión sobre su derecho que pacientemente y prudentemente hemos tratado de reivindicar por la vía diplomática" (2 April 1982).

2. Nations and Nationalism

Both Thatcher and Galtieri's speeches are loaded with patriotic terms and convey an exalted nationalist mood. Both leaders came to power with the aim of reversing what they had perceived as a steady national decline.

Thatcher refers to Great Britain as a "nation" or "our country". She says: "*Our country* has won a great victory and we are entitled to be proud"; "The *nation* had the resolution to do what it knew was right"; "Britain [still is] the *nation* that built an Empire and ruled a quarter of the world".³ Her words are loaded with traditional British sentiments of superiority and patriotism. The nation/country should be proud because it acted with bravery: "The British are competent, courageous and resolute". She is not only praising the latest victory, but also the British characteristics that had led to the formation of the Empire. She continues: "The lesson of the Falklands is that Britain has not changed and that this nation still has those sterling qualities which shine through our history".

Looking back at the past with nostalgia to recall the great deeds of the nation is a very common technique used by politicians to arouse nationalist feelings. Although by that time the British had already withdrawn from most of their former colonial territories, the Prime Minister is evoking memories of British supremacy and hegemony in international contexts. In her speech, Thatcher attempts to create a strong Britain, but leaves aside –or consciously covers up– the major problems the country was facing at that moment, such as immigration, racial conflicts, social unrest, and confrontation with the trade unions. She talks about the "spirit of the South Atlantic" or the "Falklands factor" to increase the confidence of the people and make them recover their faith in the nation. Britain, she claims, is still strong, courageous and resolute to expel "the robbers" that dared to invade British territory. The spirit of the Falklands became the umbrella term that defined the resistance of a united and powerful nation against the usurping enemy: "The spirit has stirred and the nation has begun to assert itself"; "We have ceased to be a nation in retreat". Thatcher is telling the British to wake up from their years and years of apathy, to be the nation they used to be during the British Empire. Why, she wonders, is war necessary to bring out those qualities that reflect Britishness and reassert their pride? The nation has found itself again in battle, and its strength has been reborn.

According to Sara Ahmed, there is a demand for the nation to be strong rather than soft or weak. The nation should be hard and tough to seal itself off from others and to avoid penetration. These are gendered attributes: "the soft national body is a feminized body, which is penetrated or invaded by others" (Ahmed 2004: 2). However, this strong Britain is personified as a female: "We rejoice that Britain has re-kindled that spirit which has fired *her* for generations past and which today has begun to burn as

brightly as before"; "Britain has found *herself* again in the South Atlantic". So Britain is both strong and feminine, like Thatcher herself who took pride in being the "Iron Lady".

"Our own people" and "the British" are the two ways in which Thatcher refers to the inhabitants of Great Britain. She does not give a separate identity to each nationality group within the United Kingdom. By saying "the British" and not acknowledging the different peoples, she is imposing a forced union since she sees the Scottish, the Welsh, and the English as a whole. She enforces that whole and consciously ignores the historical national differences within the territory of the United Kingdom. Likewise, when Galtieri refers to the nation, he repeatedly uses the words "país", "pueblo" and "pueblo argentino". When addressing the Argentines, he refers to them as "todos los habitantes de nuestro suelo"; or he may name the different categories of workers and professions. Note the hierarchical order: "Acá están reunidos obreros, empresarios, intelectuales, todos los órdenes de la vida nacional, en unión nacional en procura del bienestar del país y su dignidad" (Galtieri: 10 Abril 1982).

Argentina does not have any provinces that wish to be independent or any areas having separatist claims; it is a reasonably unified country in that sense. Nevertheless, the phrase "unión nacional" is highly ironic since the country was totally fragmented by the high levels of repression, torture and other abuses committed by the dictatorship. This "pueblo" is referred to as "el hidalgo pueblo argentino" or "la hidalguía del pueblo argentino"⁴. As this nation is noble and generous in character, it will reach out to its enemy: "[E]ste Pueblo dispuesto a tender la mano en la paz con hidalguía y en la paz con honor, pero también dispuesto a escarmentar a quien se atreva a tocar el territorio argentino". Galtieri is being firm, as he is the voice of a strong nation, but he is also being diplomatic –just like the noble and generous nation he represents: "[T]ender la mano al adversario pero que esto no se interprete como debilidad". Much as Thatcher claims, the nation is strong and noble but not weak, not soft.

Galtieri also uses the word "patria" to refer to the nation, and "compatriotas"⁵ when naming the citizens. He does not use "Madre Patria", since in Argentina, Spain is considered to be the Motherland. Thatcher's patriotic discourse is careful not to use terms such as Fatherland because these terms in English have negative associations with a Nazi past and discourse. Galtieri also evokes the nostalgic past when saying: "[E]stamos reunidos en esta histórica Plaza de Mayo". The Plaza de Mayo is an iconic place for the nation, since the first steps towards the country's independence from the Spanish colonizers were taken there. In this case, he is trying to make the Argentine recall previous great deeds of the nation in order to use their support to overthrow the British colonizers.

3. Language

The language used in the discourse of war is clearly patriarchal. Words that are gendered masculine include: kingdom, honour, dishonour, blood, enemy, arms, war, battle, etc. Thatcher's speeches have many similarities with the speeches of the former British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, and in fact, she openly quotes him:

During the past week, I have read again a little known speech of Winston Churchill, made just after the last war. This is what he said: 'We must find the means and the method of working together not only in the times of war, and mortal anguish, but in times of peace ...' (Thatcher: 3 July 1982).

Another remarkable war speech also delivered by a woman was the one given by Queen Elizabeth I of England to her troops at Tilbury in 1588 to repel the invasion of the Spanish Armada. Elizabeth I addresses the public as “my loving people” and brings God into the speech: “under God I have placed my chiefest strength”, “lay down by my God”, as does Galtieri when uttering “roguemos a Dios nuestro Señor que nos dé serenidad y fuerzas”. Queen Elizabeth I and Margaret Thatcher can be compared since both of them are women, both of them are leaders, and both of them have declared war. Thatcher did not feel the need to stress that she was a woman at war, whereas the Queen did, by declaring: “I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and a king of England, too” (in Abrams 1993: 999).

4. Body Language

The body has been politicized from pre-Hellenic times and has now entered all areas of research, from geography to philosophy, from religion to politics. Presidential campaigns, voting periods or job interviews where candidates must appear to be in control but also attractive to the public eye are all part of body politics. As Michel Foucault writes: “The body is directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (in Fraser & Greco 2005: 100).

The British Prime Minister paid great attention to her appearance. She was always dressed in elegant, classic suits. They were women’s suits with skirts, but in blue or light blue, a colour typically associated with men but also with the Conservative Party.⁶ She was a woman who moved well in the world of men and possessed many of the features connected with masculinity, such as tenacity, courage, authority, and resolution. She liked being among men, but there were also characteristic traits that made her stand out as a woman, such as her red lipstick or high heels. These details may seem irrelevant, but they respond to what is called power dressing: the appropriate use of clothing and hair styles to stand in a position of authority.⁷

In the case of General Galtieri, he gave his speeches in his military suits, dressed as a high ranking general in dark green with medals hanging on his jacket. Both the British Prime Minister and the Argentine President took care to wear clothes that were not expressive of their individual bodies but conformed to their power status: formal suits that restricted their bodies and gave them the appearance of self-control, suggesting also an attempt to express control over others. According to Robyn Longhurst (2001: 91-119), rigid and tense bodies are bodies ready for war and the bodies of both Thatcher and Galtieri reflect this.

The tone of voice of both leaders is also worth commenting on. Margaret Thatcher has a low pitched and rather masculine voice. However, it was not always like that. It is known that she took special training in order to lower the pitch of her voice (Atkinson: 3 January 2009). A high pitched voice, which is a common feature of women, is popularly associated with hysteria, and that would have given her a negative image in the debates and “shouting sessions” which are characteristic of the British Parliament. On the other hand, General Galtieri’s voice and diction are dark but not clear. He seems to slur his words. It was rumoured that Galtieri had problems with alcohol, which could explain his unclear diction.⁸

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that despite apparent differences, the war speeches of Margaret Thatcher and Leopoldo Galtieri are, in fact, very similar with regard to discourse. Both of them believe that truth is on their side and that they have the power

to go to war for a just cause. They are very convincing in their attempts to arouse a fighting spirit for the sake of the nation and the desire to fight for the sovereignty of the national territory. Thus, the honourable cause of defending the nation against the attack of an outside enemy becomes a reasonable justification for an imposed battle and for the killing of innocent individuals. Additionally, the body language of the leaders also helped to reinforce patriotism and patriarchal values related to nationalism and war.

Notes

1. Webster's Online Dictionary, see: <http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org/definitions/Jus+ad+bellum?cx=partner-pub-0939450753529744%3Av0qd01-tdlq&cof=FORID%3A9&ie=UTF-8&q=Jus+ad+bellum&sa=Search#906>
2. This contradictory style of discourse is reminiscent of George Orwell's 'Newspeak' and 'Doublethink' in his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: "The Ministry of Peace concerns itself with war, the Ministry of Truth with lies, the Ministry of Love with torture and the Ministry of Plenty with starvation. These contradictions are not accidental, nor do they result from ordinary hypocrisy; they are deliberate exercises in doublethink." (Orwell 1949: 184-185)
3. Emphasis added. All the quotes by Margaret Thatcher cited in this passage are to be found in the speech that she gave on 3 July 1982 (see Works Cited).
4. 'Hidalguía' means "Generosidad y nobleza de ánimo", *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*, see: http://buscon.rae.es/draeI/SrvltConsulta?TIPO_BUS=3&LEMA=hidalguía
5. 'Compatriota' means "Persona de la misma patria que otra", *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*, see: http://buscon.rae.es/draeI/SrvltConsulta?TIPO_BUS=3&LEMA=compatriota
6. Blue has always been associated with the Conservative Party and is one of the colours that form part of the logo and the official merchandising. See: <http://www.conservatives.com/Default.aspx>
7. One need only take note of the comments in the Spanish media when Defence Minister, Ms. Chacón, wore a trouser suit with high heels to address her first military parade in Madrid or when Angela Merkel's style of dress comes under review by the press.
8. When the war had just finished, some people gathered in Plaza de Mayo in order to express their indignation and to blame the government for the lost war and the victims. They shouted in anger: "Galtieri, borracho, mataste a los muchachos" (Videla April 1998; Guber 2001: 112). Moreover, in one of the diplomatic meetings with Galtieri, members of the American Embassy were impressed by the President's whisky consumption (Hastings & Jenkins 1983: 108).

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